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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [NATO](#) [MK](#)
SUBJECT: MACEDONIA: ETHNIC ALBANIAN LEADERS ON NATO AND
INTERNAL POLITICAL STABILITY

REF: SKOPJE 194

Classified By: POLOFF NEISULER FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) In March 19 meetings with ethnic Albanian leaders Thaci, from junior governing coalition partner DPA, and Ahmeti, from DUI, the Ambassador stressed the importance of maintaining political stability and resolving the name dispute with Greece to secure a NATO membership invitation this April. Both Thaci and Ahmeti assessed that, recently, PM Gruevski had become a little less rigid in his position on a compromise solution for the name. While Thaci claimed (surprisingly) that was due to his own threat to leave the governing coalition, Ahmeti attributed it to the overall positive and supportive messages coming from the media and other government and opposition politicians. Thaci said that on March 23 he would definitely leave the governing coalition if Gruevski failed to address his demands (reftel). Both Thaci and Ahmeti underlined the vital importance of NATO accession for them and their voters. End summary.

KEEP THE SITUATION CALM AND RESOLVE THE NAME DISPUTE

¶2. (C) The Ambassador met separately with Menduh Thaci, president of ethnic Albanian DPA (junior governing coalition partner), and with Ali Ahmeti, president of the largest ethnic Albanian party DUI, on March 19 to discuss Macedonia's internal political situation (reftel) and to brief the two leaders on the mood in Washington regarding Macedonia's NATO readiness. The Ambassador noted that the name dispute with Greece remains the only outstanding obstacle to Macedonia's NATO membership bid. She stressed that there should be no political shenanigans in Macedonia at this juncture.

THACI: THE PM IS LIKE A RESTLESS CHILD...

¶3. (C) The Ambassador told Thaci that the political decision about DPA's participation in the government was only his to make. She stressed, however, that a recent statement by DPA Deputy Prime Minister Imer Aliu that appealed to eAlbanians to boycott Macedonia's institutions was "unhelpful and divisive." Admitting that he was the author of Aliu's statement, Thaci said that the statement could have been even harsher. Clearly frustrated, he likened PM Gruevski to a

"restless child, playing with fire." He added that the Prime Minister's behavior had put Thaci in a difficult position, and that he could not support Gruevski as he slid "into the abyss." In Thaci's opinion, Aliu's statement had been a "wake-up call" for Gruevski, who earlier had underestimated the seriousness of DPA's threats. "I can't lose all my credibility with eAlbanian voters, while Gruevski is trying to paint himself as the new Alexander the Great," added Thaci.

I NEED A DEAL - A NATO INVITATION!

14. (C) Thaci said that his actions were "not a game" and that he needed evidence from the Prime Minister that he would keep working on the six demands DPA had submitted to him last week. Recognizing that these demands could not be concluded quickly, he stressed he was mainly interested in a political process, and in Gruevski's willingness to recognize eAlbanian grievances. Thaci said that Gruevski needs his support in conducting operations in eAlbanian areas. He asserted that Gruevski could "get anything from me, but I need a deal - a NATO invitation!" Dismissing Gruevski's claims that a compromise with the Greeks would destroy Macedonian identity, Thaci said that only a compromise could get Macedonia into NATO, and only NATO membership could ensure a secure future for the country. That is why, Thaci said, he had given Gruevski until March 23 to accept a deal with DPA. Without such a deal, Gruevski and his government would fall, Thaci concluded.

15. (C) The Ambassador warned against any actions that could jeopardize or appear to jeopardize Macedonia's political stability. Thaci vehemently protested against any suggestion

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that his actions were irresponsible. He assessed his latest actions as "very helpful" to Macedonia's NATO aspirations. If 10 days ago the Prime Minister was "up in the clouds and rigid, my pressure has made him more flexible and constructive," Thaci added. The Ambassador concluded that behind-the-scenes pressure could be helpful, as long as DPA's public behavior was responsible.

AHMETI: POSITIVE MOMENTUM ON NAME COMPROMISE...

16. (C) Echoing Thaci's assessment that there was discernable positive momentum on the eMacedonian side, DUI's Ahmeti told the Ambassador that Gruevski's rigid pronouncements about the name were different from eMacedonian MPs' private statements reflecting more flexibility on the same issue. Ahmeti said that eMacedonian media seemed to be preparing the public for a compromise. He expressed his readiness "to add to the positive messages coming from the eMacedonian side," and to cooperate across party lines "to relax the situation" and achieve DUI's "vital objective - NATO membership."

...EARLY ELECTIONS IMMEDIATELY AFTER NATO INVITATION

17. (C) Ahmeti said that early elections (but not announced before the NATO Summit) were the only cure for the current "unsustainable" coalition. He acknowledged EU concerns that early elections would slow down necessary reforms, but countered that the current government was not doing enough to "defend the rights of citizens of this country." Ahmeti was certain that, if VMRO and DUI both supported early elections, the appointment of a new government would happen by the end of July. Having reviewed the pros and cons of early elections, the Ambassador warned against the possibility of elections being tarnished by intra-ethnic violence or ballot-stuffing, which would undermine Macedonia's 2006 electoral success. Ahmeti countered that Gruevski should take the responsibility to keep his coalition partner DPA in line, and added he did not want "an undeserved victory" (through cheating). If there were no early elections, Ahmeti

predicted that all opposition parties would cease their constructive engagement in the government's legislative agenda.

COMMENT

18. (C) Thaci's comments on his role, motivations and goals bore little resemblance to reality. Reality being his unfocused desire to raise his poll ratings (likely an unsuccessful effort). Ahmeti's views were far more logical. In their meetings with the Ambassador, both Thaci and Ahmeti tried to present themselves as reasonable politicians working for what is best for Macedonia. While a somewhat defensive Thaci appealed to the Ambassador "to understand that my grievances are fair," Ahmeti highlighted his party's recent constructive attitude and reliability. Clearly, the specter of early elections determines every step that DPA and DUI make in order to ensure their electoral success. The two eAlbanian leaders' positive readings of Gruevski's ability to compromise on the name may be a reflection of a real positive movement in the government. However, it may also be the wishful thinking of leaders whose voters see NATO accession, and not the preservation of Macedonia's name, as their most "vital interest."

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